

## Students to work school elections

Votes will be tallied in May under new state law

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Dozens of Macomb County high school students will receive a hands-on civics lesson when they man the polls as election workers in the first-ever May school elections.

County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh is hiring 72 students to work the polls alongside veteran election inspectors, providing the teens with a vital role in school board elections that have a direct impact on their future.

"We saw this as a great opportunity to get the students involved. We didn't know how this was going to fly, but the students really like the idea," said Sabaugh, a Warren Democrat. "They were so eager to do this."

Some educators say the student workers may be unique to Michigan, perhaps even the nation. Teens will work two part-time shifts of 7 1/2 hours each, earning pay of \$75. All of the 36 precincts run by Sabaugh's office will include three experienced poll workers.

State law allows election workers of 16 years of age or older. Ninety-one students have applied to work in the May 3 election.

Under the election consolidation system recently adopted by the state -- allowing elections on just four dates per year -- school elections in Macomb County have been moved from June to May. The largest bloc of voters in Macomb will be handled by Sabaugh.

In the past, the school districts ran school elections, with Sabaugh overseeing the overall election process. This time, Sabaugh will play a new role, running the school elections in Macomb Township and most of Clinton Township, involving 104,000 voters in six school districts.

The municipal clerks in those two communities declined to participate.

T.C. Wallace, superintendent of the Mount Clemens school district, which is contributing five poll workers, commended Sabaugh for a fresh approach to school elections. A 38-year educator who has worked in eight states and three Michigan school districts, Wallace said he believes the student poll workers is a unique idea.

"That whole process of school voting was so ingrained and so routine that no one thought outside the box," he said.

Sabaugh will run the school elections in the precincts that fall within the Macomb and Clinton township boundaries for Chippewa Valley, L'Anse Creuse, Mount Clemens, Fraser, Utica and New Haven school districts.

"I know there's a lot of interest among our students. We're excited about it," said Diane Blain, a Chippewa Valley spokeswoman.

Government teachers were contacted to recruit students and officials say many of the best and brightest at local high schools have stepped forward.

Sabaugh said the students may provide the start of a new generation of poll workers to eventually replace the current crop of election workers, consisting disproportionately of senior citizens. The county clerk also hopes that other municipal clerks, which now run the school voting process under election consolidation, will follow suit with a youth movement at the polls.

"I think it's positive for the schools," she said, "and it's positive for the community."